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BY  
M. K. EROSHKIN

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Mir, Zemstvo and Soviet

The Bolshevist Economic Policy

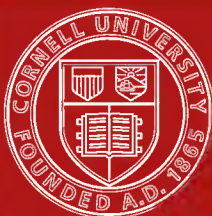
The Land Problem in Russia

The Labor Problem in Russia

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# THE SOVIETS IN RUSSIA

By  
M. K. EROSHKIN

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# Introduction

The author of this pamphlet, M. K. Eroshkin, is a graduate of the Petrograd Polytechnic Institute. He took an active part in the Revolutionary Movement and was the Chairman of the Perm Committee of the Party of Socialists-Revolutionists. Under the Provisional Government he represented the Minister of Agriculture in the Perm District, and later was Assistant-Minister of Agriculture in the Provisional Government of the Ural.

M. K. Eroshkin came to this country with Catherine Breshkovsky, and during his short stay in this country has done very much to enlighten the American people about conditions in and the problems of Russia through a series of articles printed in our weekly magazine, *Struggling Russia*. We reprint these articles feeling certain that their lucidity and depth of thought will make them of interest for every American interested in Russia.

A. J. SACK,

*Director of the Russian Information  
Bureau in the U. S.*

May 20, 1919.





# The Soviets in Russia

VERY frequently, we, Russian democrats and socialists, hear the following from intelligent and enlightened Americans with radical convictions and leanings: "Very true, Bolshevism is an evil; the Bolsheviki are destroying Russia. But you have Soviets there which are taking the place of your parliaments. The Soviets are the most democratic form of government ever tried in this world. We are amazed, therefore, why you, Russian radicals, are opposed to the wishes of your own people. The Bolsheviki, admittedly, are only a political party, but the Soviets are organs of Government. How, then, can you confound and join them together?"

Such questions indicate the unfamiliarity of Americans with both the history of the Soviets and their significance and role in the Russian Revolution. Therefore we desire to explain briefly what the Soviets are, how and for what purpose they were originated, their present stage of evolution and the effect of their political functioning on the Russian people, the Russian State and Russia's welfare.

The idea of organizing a Soviet of Workmen's Deputies first originated in Petrograd, in October, 1905, with the Mensheviki faction of the Social-Democrats. The idea was supported by the Socialists-Revolutionists, but met with strong opposition from the Bolsheviki, who styled the creation of such organizations "the invention of semi-bourgeois parties to enthrall the proletariat in a partyless swamp." But the first steps of the Soviet organized by the Petrograd workers met with such success among the masses of the Petrograd proletariat that the Bolsheviki had no choice but to enter that Soviet. The Soviet never for a moment, at that time, planned to demand for itself plenary powers. Its aim consisted only in organizing the revolutionary forces and sentiment.

That Soviet, with Khrustalev-Nosar and N. D. Avksentieff at its head, did not last very long, and was driven out of existence when the autocracy of the Tzar regained its strength.

Its leaders were banished to Siberia, and from Siberia they escaped to France.

When the Second Revolution broke out in March, 1917, and it became necessary to hold together the revolutionary elements to keep them from becoming an uncontrollable avalanche, the Socialist factions of the State Duma and the committees of the Socialist parties of Petrograd at once, without regular elections, on March 23, organized the Petrograd Soviet of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies, with Tcheidze, Kerensky and Sokolov at its head. Other Soviets began to be formed, after the pattern of the one in Petrograd, in all cities and factories where large numbers of workmen and soldiers were found. In May, 1917, there was also organized the first All-Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies, led by Catherine Breshkovsky, Chernov, Avksentiev and Martiushin.

The program of all these Soviets may be formulated in the following paragraphs:

1. To organize the revolutionary forces of the Russian people.
2. To organize and give expression to its political and social demands in connection with the Revolution.
3. To give support and aid to the Provisional Government in its task of coordinating the State machinery of the liberated country.
4. To concentrate the forces of the working masses, as the most interested in the preservation of the newly-won liberties.

When the revolutionary storm had subsided and when, with the aid of the Soviets and the political parties, the necessity of the retention of the acquired liberties had penetrated deeply into the consciousness of the people; when laws fixing definitely the rule of the people locally (township, village and the Government Zemstvo) and centrally, for all Russia (the Constituent Assembly), based on the fundamental practices of universal democracy and the Socialist International—universal, direct, equal and secret suffrage—were drawn up and adopted, the Soviets should have retired in favor of the new governmental democratic institutions.

The expression of the political struggle could well have been taken care of by the highly developed political parties. For the economic struggle there existed the various trade and cooperative organizations, which, through their immediate influence upon their Deputies, could in a peaceful way have won for themselves, step by step, through acts of legislation, ever-increasing rights in the interests of the people. Thus the organization of the national forces would have been divided, as we all thought and hoped, along the following lines: the Zemstvos; the Constituent Assembly; the Labor and cooperative bodies and the political parties.

But the fates had ordained otherwise. The Bolsheviks, true to their slogans, "The dictatorship of the proletariat"—"All steam ahead for Socialism," unfurled a new banner upon which was written "All Power to the Soviets," instead of "All Power to the Constituent Assembly." In vain were the attempts to persuade them that it is impossible to confuse the mind of the people with concepts of contradictory powers; in vain were long speeches pointing out their treason to the international democratic and Socialist principle of universal suffrage. The Bolsheviks, to whom the end has always justified the means, overthrew the Government by armed force, dispersed the Constituent Assembly and proclaimed Russia a "Federal Socialist Soviet Republic."

According to the Soviet Constitution, Russia is governed by Soviets of Deputies, elected by the secret, direct and equal vote of all the working masses. In fact, there never was either a secret election in Soviet Russia, or one based on equal suffrage. Elections are usually conducted at a given factory or foundry at open meetings, by the raising of hands and always under the knowing eye of the chairman. The majority of the workers very frequently do not take any part in these elections at all. The rights of a minority are never recognized, as proportional representation has been rejected.

As regards direct elections, it is again a mere phrase. The Central Executive Committee, which is supposed to embody the supreme administrative organ of the country, was actually being elected through a four-grade system. Local Soviets

send their representatives to the Provincial Congress; the Provincial Congress is represented by delegates at the All-Russian Congress, and only this last body elects the Central Executive Committee. Often the delegates are not elected by the regular meetings of the Soviets at all, but are sent by the Executive Committees, cleverly handpicked by the Bolsheviks after the system of proportional representation was rejected.

In this way the accepted electoral system of the Bolsheviks differs little from the ill-famed system of elections to the old State Duma, promulgated by the law of June 3, 1907, with the only essential difference that while that law was designed to elect only monarchists, this system is calculated to elect only Bolsheviks. The analogy does not end here. Just as under the old regime opponents of Tzarism were occasionally elected to the Duma in spite of the corrupt electoral system, so in the beginning of the Bolshevik rule Socialists had their representatives in the Soviets. And, just as in the days of the Tzar, the minions of the Government would drive and banish the revolutionists to Siberia, so now the servants of His Majesty, Lenin, are filling the prisons with Socialists and are shooting them down.

The exclusion from the Soviets of all who think differently from the Bolsheviks developed gradually. They "cleansed" the Soviets in Perm and Ekaterinburg, in January, 1918; in Ufa, Saratov, Samara, Kazan and Yaroslavl, in December, 1917; in Moscow and Petrograd in February, 1918. They were excluding all Socialists-Revolutionists and the Mensheviks, to say nothing of the People's Socialists and members of the Labor Group. Often, when workers demanded new elections to the Soviet (as happened in Petrograd late in December of 1917, and early in January, 1918), and such elections did take place, the Bolsheviks would not permit the newly elected delegates to enter the building of the Soviet and frequently arrested them. Gradually only Bolsheviks and Socialists-Revolutionists of the Left remained in the Soviets. Soon, however, after the assassination in Moscow of Count Mirbach, the German Ambassador, and the attempt at rebellion in Moscow

early in June, 1918, by the Socialists-Revolutionists of the Left, the Bolsheviki began to fill up the prisons with the latter just as they did with the Socialists-Revolutionists of the Right and the Mensheviki.

So, practically, there remained only Bolsheviki in the Soviets. And as there was no difference of opinion among them, regular meetings were soon abandoned altogether and the ostensible "rule of the working masses" thus definitely disappeared. A few persons, often appointed from above (the Bolsheviki often had recourse to bayonets to support the fiction of Soviet Rule: in Tumen the Executive Committee of a non-existent Soviet was brought from Ekaterinburg under a convoy of 800 Red Guards) would rule and lord it over the people, tired and weary of the war and a sterile social revolution.

As time wore on the people here and there would rise against the Bolsheviki, until finally the Czecho-Slovaks gave this movement an organized form. Fronts were erected everywhere, and soon, instead of Executive Committees of Workmen's Deputies, there appeared in those regions of Soviet Russia adjacent to these fronts, new "administrative" organs, the so-called "Military-Revolutionary Committees," which had nothing at all in common with the "rule of the working masses." These would consist of a group of two or three people, mostly members of Red Army organizations, who would take to themselves all "civil and military powers" and would rule despotically over their virtual subjects.

Occasional outbursts of popular wrath serve as indications of the depth of the dissatisfaction which is engendered by the Soviets and their off-shoots, the Military-Revolutionary Committees. Thus, in the Polevsky Works, in Ekaterinburg County, a mob of peasants, armed with axes, scythes and sticks, fell upon the Soviets and beast-like tore into fragments fifty Bolsheviki. In the Neviansk Works the insurrection of the workers against the Red Army lasted for three days until reinforcements from Perm finally subdued this "counter-revolutionary" revolt. In Okhansk County 2,000 peasants were shot down for demanding the abolition of the Soviets and the reestablishment of the rule of the people.

It is apparent, therefore, that the Soviets are not a democratic institution, but merely the dictatorship of the Bolsheviki; that they do not represent the people, and that they cannot, in fact, owing to their very form, represent it; that the Soviets have usurped rights which do not belong to them. Therefore, we, Russian democrats and socialists, are opposed to the Soviets, and stand for a Constitutional Assembly and for all those who support it.

## Mir, Zemstvo and Soviet

**P**ARLOR Bolshevism is hard at work. In evening dress, reclining in soft arm-chairs after a tasty dinner, under the soft lights of the drawing-rooms, bathing in the mellifluous odors of perfume tempered by the delicate aroma of costly cigars, elegantly gowned ladies and fashion-plate gentlemen are busily ransacking the affairs of the world, and, of course, principally the travails of Russia. Is Bolshevism really a menace for the world, or is it a system of universal happiness and content? Some gentleman who has spent two or three months in Russia is, probably, the center of attraction in the room. For, is not he a precious source of "first hand" information, the one who has been on the spot and has seen and heard it all personally?

What of it, if this "font of knowledge" lived at "Hotel Europe," traveled in the special car of the "International Society," made himself understood through an interpreter and never knew nor read anything about Russia's history or her institutions! Here, in America, he had just accidentally heard about the Russian "Mir," and in Russia he had heard about the "Soviets." So, why not link these two together and serve it up to his audience as the "very latest" in Russian democracy, and present the "Soviet" as a new form of the old Russian "Mir." Occasionally, at one of these gatherings a newspaper worker, who is "covering" Russia for his paper, is present. For want of better material, and trusting to luck and the credulity of his readers, he "cleverly" presents this theory of the Soviets as the last step in democratic government, in the columns of his next Sunday edition, coupling it closely with that ancient Russian form of communal self-government, the "Mir," and winding up with the pathetic assertion that America, a democratic country, is in duty bound to recognize Soviet Russia, another democratic land! And the reader swallows it. "Mir," "Zemstvo" and "Soviet" is all foreign matter to him, and willy-nilly he comes to think: "Why not, indeed? Did not we maintain relations with Tzarist Russia,—why not continue now to deal with the Russian

people directly, through their Soviets which rule the country?"

For these American citizens who are sincerely interested in Russia, who want to have relations with the Russian people, who have given their sympathies to this people in its struggle with the Autocracy, I wish, as a Russian, to explain what the Russian "Mir," the Russian "Zemstvo" and the Russian "Soviet" are,—the differences between them, and what form of self-government may lay claim to popular recognition, as the organ which expresses the actual free will of the people.

Without delving too deeply into Russian history, without drawing analogies and parallels between certain institutions of ancient Russian life and similar institutions in the history of other nations, we shall simply accept as a fact, supported by historic data as well as by contemporary observation, that in the Russian village from ancient times until practically very recent days there existed a very interesting social phenomenon—the discussion of local affairs by an assembly of village peasants. This assembly was called a "Mir."

In the light of historic research on the one hand, and from a comparative study of modern conditions prevailing in the recently colonized villages of Siberia, on the other hand, it has been established beyond dispute that the existence of the "Mir" was closely bound up with the land relations, particularly those which may be characterized as communal allotments relations. Wherever a land commune (or "obschina") existed, there was also found a "Mir," and, on the other hand, wherever the form of private-lot ownership prevailed, such as in the Ukraine, in the stake-lands of Siberia, etc., the "Mir" did not exist.

It is necessary to state that Russian colonization, or to be more precise, the colonization of the northeastern and southeastern parts of the Russian flatlands proceeded by spurts and bounds. The colonization was prompted by the never-ending quest for better lands, and in the majority of cases, the removals and settlements were made by village groups and not by individual settlers. While land was plentiful and the settlers sparse, there was little occasion for regulating the land relations between the members of the com-



mune (the entire village, as a rule, constituted such a commune which owned collectively a given piece of land), but when, later, a land scarcity was beginning to be felt owing to the increase in population and the land-grabbing by the nobles, and later to the arbitrary grants issued by the Tzars to their "deserving servants," there appeared a necessity for the reallocation of the land on more equitable principles. Hence, the development of that phenomenon known in Russian history as the "Mir." The peasants of a given village, who held each a certain parcel of the communal land, would usually gather in the village square and in common decide all questions pertaining to the reallocation of this land. "The right of voice" at the "Mir" belonged to all the inhabitants of the village entitled to land lots, who were, in most cases, the heads of the families. Usually the father was at the head of the family,—the "old man,"—and, hence the origin of that old Russian expression "The elders have decided at the 'Mir.'"

When the Government began to tax land and the peasants were compelled to pay contributions (*podati*), the problem of the distribution of the taxes among the landholders was added to the deliberations of the "Mir." Later came other dues: fire taxes, road taxes and horse obligations, and these, too, came under the jurisdiction of the "Mir."

After the peasants were liberated from their condition of serfdom, and discontent with the insufficient final land allotment began to grow strong, the Government took measures to gradually deprive the peasants from the opportunities of discussing their land problems, first, by limiting reallocations to certain periods and later by the introduction of a new functionary, the "Zemsky administrator." He was to replace the former self-rule of the peasants to the extent that they were to discharge all their duties and obligations not in accordance with their own will and self-determination, but in compliance with his orders.

Thus, as we see, this outstanding fact in the history of the Russian village amounted to the appearance among the Russian peasants of a peculiar form of self-government, the

main feature of which was that the lot-holders of the village would gather at meetings and by mutual effort solve all questions relating to the holding of the land and to the payment of the taxes levied upon it. This form of agrarian self-government was known as the "Mir."

It would be interesting to learn now what common features or connections there are between the "Mir," the "Zemstvo" and the "Soviets"; whether the latter are the further development of the former phenomenon, or represent new forms of self-government heretofore unknown to the Russian people. In order to answer this question, we must first, in brief, acquaint the reader with the essentials of the Zemstvo and the Soviet.

In the early sixties, in the so-called Period of Great Reforms, under the pressure of popular and social movements, Tzar Alexander II made a number of concessions. He granted (in 1864) among other reforms, such as the liberation of the peasants from serfdom, the judicial reforms, the new military service laws,—a reform in rural government, namely, a system of Zemstvo administrations in 36 governments, and later, in 1869, a similar reform for city self-government. The Zemstvos were divided into county (ooyezd) and government (gubernia) units. In the elections to the Zemstvos only persons with defined land-owning qualifications were allowed to take part, and the elections were conducted on a class system, like the old Prussian electoral system. The great majority of the people could not participate in these elections, and these organs, the Zemstvos, could not, essentially, be termed true, full and free representation of the people. In addition, all Zemstvos were placed, by the law of 1864 and the supplementary law of 1894, under the surveillance—as regards the legality and expediency of their decisions—of the administrative organs of the Ministry of the Interior, the darkest of all the ministries of Tzarist Russia, which was strangling every sign of free expression of the popular will. The law of 1894 even raised the election qualifications, and, as a result, only very few peasants could take part in the voting.

In spite, however, of the effort of the Government to destroy the Zemstvos, in one way or another, they grew and

their activities developed. They covered Russia with a number of hospitals, opened thousands of schools and a number of museums of agricultural economy, and, in general, worked faithfully among the people combatting the prevailing darkness and serving as a ray of light, no matter how pale and timid, in the black night of Tzarist Russia.

The Russian Revolution of March, 1917, which did away with the autocracy, brought to the forefront, besides the realization of the political liberties of the person and citizen, also the problem of the immediate organization of popular rule. The Provisional Government, created and put forward by the Revolution, strove with all possible speed to rest upon the organized force of the people, on organized public opinion. These results could be obtained only through the immediate introduction of popular rule from the bottom to the very top. In rapid succession laws were passed relating to the Zemstvo and City self-governments, and later the Election law for the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. The Russian people began with feverish haste to rebuild its life upon new foundations, and at the beginning of November all Russia was covered with newly elected Zemstvo and City self-government systems. The newly constructed edifice required only a roof—the Constituent Assembly—to complete it. The Bolshevik overturn, however, destroyed everything. The Constituent Assembly was dispersed and the Zemstvos were closed. In many places bayonets were used to drive out the Zemstvo workers from their places and to substitute the new rule of the so-called Soviets.

In accordance with the law passed by the Provisional Government on May 21, 1917, the administration of all local "needs and uses" was entrusted to the people through organs elected on the basis of a universal, direct, equal and secret vote—the Zemstvos. These were divided into four classes: township (*volost*), county (*ooyezd*), government (*gubernia*), and territorial (*oblast*). The township unit comprised the administration of several villages; the county unit covered a few scores of townships, the government unit a number of counties, and the territorial—a number of governments, thus form-

ing an unbroken line of concentrated circuits of activity. All the Zemstvos were, furthermore, allowed to get together on working terms in order to prosecute their plans more effectively for the welfare of the people. In the elections to the Zemstvos all citizens above the age of 20, without distinction of sex, religion or nationality, could participate.

The fact is that never in Russia, and for that matter in any other country in the world, was there witnessed such an eagerness on the part of the people to participate in the construction of their new, liberated life. Practically everybody voted; in some places the number of voters reached 90 per cent. of the eligible part of the population, and the average all over the country was about 80 per cent. Owing to the adoption of the proportional system of representation, nearly every shade of popular opinion was represented in these administrative organs, but the majority was held by the toiling masses, the peasantry and the workmen. It was, indeed, in the truest sense of the word, a popular representation. The people had won the right to be the masters of their own destiny and they wanted to exercise this right.

The sphere of jurisdiction of the new Zemstvo institutions covered all that could generally be termed as "local needs and uses," and, in particular, was as follows:

(1) The care, within the territory of the given Zemstvo, of education,—lower, secondary and higher,—with the cooperation of the All-Russian Ministry of Education.

(2) The care of the popular health, the development of medical aid and hygiene and the spread of its knowledge among the masses.

(3) The care of orphans, the sick, the injured, the aged and also of soldiers who had been incapacitated in the war.

(4) The organization and coordination of the local courts, elected by the Zemstvo assemblies.

(5) The organization and coordination of labor markets, and the introduction of mediation and employment agencies for the hire of agricultural help.

(6) The development and care of local ways of communica-

tion, canals, the building of central and village roads and branch by-roads.

(7) The collection of State taxes.

(8) The administration of the Land Fund, etc., etc.

Practically all matters pertaining to the cultural and economic life of the Russian people were embodied in this plan and entrusted to the rule of the people. A wide field was opened for popular initiative and activity, limited only by the general and necessary principles of legality.

The law establishing the new Zemstvo institutions did not, at the same time, forget the old Russian village institution, our peasant "Mir." Resting upon the will of the people and trusting in its power, the Provisional Government did not destroy this "Mir," but took steps to connect it, through land commissions, with the chain of popularly-elected Zemstvo organs. It upheld the right of the peasants to assemble to decide their land questions, extended the right of participation in the "Mir" to the women of the village and delegated to the "Mir" executive power in the form of the "land commissioners." These commissions were charged, on the one hand, with the duty of preparing all material for the great land reform which was to transfer the land permanently into the hands of the people, and, on the other hand, with adjudicating all incidents and friction arising between the land owners and the communal lot holders. Thus the "Mir," the "Zemstvo," the city "Dumas," crowned by the Constituent Assembly, were to represent the great self-governing Russia.

But fate had decreed otherwise. Instead of a great Russia, we have an impoverished one; instead of a self-governing one—we see her groaning under the coarse heel and bayonet of the Red Guardsman; instead of freedom, we see her under the yoke of new emperors, Lenine and Trotsky, and new bureaucratic institutions under the name of Soviets. What are the Soviets?

In my article "The Soviets in Russia" I have already pointed out that the Soviets originated during the Revolution of 1905, were afterwards speedily crushed by the Tzar's Government, but reappeared again in 1917 as revolutionary organs

which aimed to organize the revolutionary sentiment among the masses of the Russian people, to support the Provisional Government in its efforts to rebuild Russia's life on new foundations, to help the Russian people organize organs of self-rule,—and upon their organization to retire from the field.

The Bolshevik coup d'état overturned everything, and the Soviets, from a temporary revolutionary organ have become, in accordance with the Bolshevik constitution, a permanent, not only legislative, but also an executive, judicial, revolutionary and propagandist (world-revolution) organ. In a word, it offers everything your heart desires and is a political Jack of all trades.

In accordance with the so-called constitution of the Soviets, these are being elected by the citizens of the Russian "Socialist Republic," now 18 months old, at meetings of the various villages or factories. The method of elections is not defined in the constitution and is determined by the local Soviets at their own sweet will. In these elections, according to the constitution, only such citizens who make their living by their own labor may participate. All merchants, middlemen, persons with any income, persons connected with the Church in any capacity, all who have been in the service of the police department under the old regime, are barred from voting, and likewise, all who employ hired labor for purposes of profit-making. As this last clause is ambiguously worded, the local Soviets have been barring from the elections everyone who employs even a house servant, practically all professionals and intellectuals. To these classes of the population deprived of the vote, according to the constitution, the Bolshevik practice adds also all those who do not accept the Soviet rule, that means, the entire Russian "intelligentsia," and among the latter almost all the public school teachers, the best and the most devoted friends the Russian people have ever had.

The Bolshevik "Socialist Republic" does not recognize the principles of universal or equal suffrage, neither does it recognize direct elections, as the lower Soviets elect the higher, the higher elect the county (ooyezd) Soviets, the county elect the government Soviets, and the government Soviets elect the

All-Russian. The Soviet constitution does not recognize the secret ballot. The voting takes place in the open and is conducted by the raising of hands. The Soviet constitution does not recognize the principle of proportional representation and, therefore, only the voice of the partisans of the Soviet rule may be heard in the Soviets.

Such is the legal aspect, the political side of the situation. The actual situation is, however, much worse. The Russian peasant could, in all fairness, scarcely be suspected of being a capitalist, and even according to the Soviet constitution, no matter how twisted, he could not be denied a vote. But fully aware that the peasants constitute a majority and are, as a whole, opposed to the Bolsheviki, the latter have destroyed the Soviets in the villages and instead of these they have created so-called "Committees of the Poor," i.e., aggregations of inebriates, propertyless, worthless and work-hating peasants. For, whoever wishes to work can find work in the Russian village which is always short of agricultural help. These "Committees of the Poor" have been delegated to represent the peasantry of Russia.

Small wonder that the peasants are opposed to this scheme which has robbed them of self-government. Small wonder that their hatred for these "organizations" reaches such a stage that entire settlements are rising against these Soviets and their pretorians, the Red Guardsmen, and in their fury are not only murdering these Soviet officials, but are practicing fearful cruelties upon them, as happened in December, 1918, in the governments of Pskov, Kaluga and Tver.

By removing and arresting all those delegates who are undesirable to them, the Bolsheviki have converted these Soviets into organizations loyal to themselves, and of course, fear to think of a true general election, for that will seal their doom at once.

I shall not dwell longer on the further description of the Soviets and refer the reader to my previous article. I will now attempt to draw up a summary of what we have stated above.

Historically, the "Mir" was born in the Russian village to solve land problems and relations, and as such it was incorporated in the Law of the Provisional Government of May 20, 1917, as an integral part of the Russian Zemstvo institutions. The Zemstvo institutions were created in 1864, as a concession of the Tzar's Government to the popular movement, with a jurisdiction over certain local "wants and uses." After the law of the Provisional Government was passed, the Zemstvo institutions, in the form of township, county, government and territorial units, covered all Russia, with jurisdiction over all the cultural and economic interests of the Russian people. The Soviets first came into being in 1905, and developed in 1917 as revolutionary organs aiming at the protection of the gains of the Revolution and the aiding of the Provisional Government in establishing Russian life on the basis of popular rule.

Politically, the "Mir" was a popular assembly of the holders of land lots in a village where the system of land allotment prevailed. The Zemstvos were organs of the popular will, elected on the basis of universal, direct, equal, secret and proportional suffrage. The Soviets, according to the Soviet constitution, are class organizations, a dictatorship of the proletariat, elected by limited, indirect, unequal, open and not proportional suffrage, i.e., elections conducted in full disregard of all democratic and Socialist principles.

Practically, the "Mir" concerned itself only with land and kindred problems in the peasant village. The Zemstvo, however, was the actual free expression of the general will of the people and was charged with the construction and regeneration of Russian life on the foundations of right and liberty. The Soviets have degenerated into narrow, bureaucratic class organizations, brazenly trampling upon all the rights of civil freedom. Instead of liberty—license, instead of legality—lawlessness, instead of democracy—tyranny, and instead of social peace—civil war, assault, homicide and rivers of blood.



# The Bolshevik Economic Policy

**B**Y this time it is well known that after having proclaimed a "Socialist state" in Russia, the Bolsheviks have brought the industrial and commercial life of Russia to a state of bankruptcy. We shall not dwell here on the horrors of starvation which the inhabitants of Russian cities are experiencing; we shall not touch upon the awful rate of mortality which is afflicting the "paradise of the Soviet Republic"; we shall only marshal before the reader a few illustrations of the economic policies of the Soviet rule and their consequences.

It is a matter of common knowledge that the Bolsheviks have nationalized Russia's industries. In place of the former executive Directors of enterprises, there were appointed "commissaries," and in the factories, works and foundries there were introduced so-called "business Soviets," local administrative and managerial agencies, elected by the workers of the local industry or mining district. These "business Soviets" had no connection with the "commissary," who, according to the decrees, was to take the place of the executive Director of former days and to manage the financing and coordinating of the entire productivity of a given industrial district. The financial link between the central and the district authorities, regardless of all efforts of the so-called "Supreme Soviet of National Economy," consisted only in continuous and unceasing demands on the part of the district Soviet for money, money and more money.

No accounting, no planning of production and distribution was in existence. There were only advance budgets and expense lists. The expenditures grew colossally while the productivity declined in inverse ratio to the growth of expenses. Consider, for instance, the Kishtym district in the Urals, one of the richest copper districts in Russia, which produced, until taken over by the Soviet, about one-third of all the copper mined in Russia, 600,000 poods (1 "pood"—36 pounds) annually, or 50,000 poods a month. During the Bolshevik administration, from December 1917 to June 1918, a period of 6 months, the district's output was 48,000 poods,

i.e., the production fell to 8,000 poods a month—a decline of over 600 per cent. Simultaneously, the expenses, with the same number of workers employed, grew from 650,000 roubles to 5 million roubles per month—approximately 770 per cent. The cost of producing a pood of copper, therefore, rose from 18 roubles to 88, while the fixed market price of copper remained 32 roubles per pood. In other words, every pood of copper produced represented a loss of 56 roubles.

Can any industrial enterprise exist under such conditions in normal times? Of course, not. Every owner prudent in the least would close up an enterprise like that at once. Even the Bolsheviks, after wasting several billions of roubles in the Urals, were forced to close up many foundries, as even their tireless printing presses could not keep pace with the colossal amounts required for the pay-rolls of the workers. After the Bolsheviks were driven out of the Urals, the Provisional Government of the Ural Region found in operation only 46 foundries instead of the 150 that were active before the coming of the Bolsheviks. The others were closed down either on account of lack of money, or for absence of materials. The remaining foundries were barely existing, selling the product most in demand—iron, which increased in price from 5 roubles 80 kopecks to 30 roubles per pood.

Another example: The Nadeshdin Works in the Bogoslov mining district, one of the most important iron-ore districts in the Urals, with its 9 dynamos and 6 Martens furnaces, yielded annually 12 million poods of iron. In January, 1918, only 6 dynamos were working, in February only 5, from March to May only 3, and by the end of September, 1918, the works were closed down. There was no ore, no coal, no manganese-ore left. The old stores had been consumed, and the population was left without work and food, to famish and die from hunger and typhus. My father, a weigher in the Bogoslov coal mines, wrote me that they were devouring dogs and cats and were making bread of a mixture of oats and willow bark.

A third example: The Cheliabinsk coal mines, which until “nationalization” had had an output of 60 million poods a

year,—5 millions monthly,—had yielded from January to May, 1918, an average of 150,000 poods per month. The average number of shifts fell from 25 to 8 a month, and the 48-hour-week was thus reduced to 8 hours.

And so everywhere. A colossal decline in production and a corresponding increase in expenditures. The State was converted into a pension fund and the workers into pension beneficiaries. If this is what "socialistic" happiness amounts to, you can readily understand our attitude towards such experiments in "socialization." Instead of developing the productive forces, the Soviet government not only remained stationary, but even retrogressed a great distance. In place of progress came reaction, and in place of construction, neglect and destruction everywhere. We must also bear in mind that in most of the Ural districts the mine-pits are inundated, the mines dilapidated, the machinery rusty, decayed and rendered useless, the dams broken through and the turbines gone to smash.

Such is the outward aspect of "socialization" and "nationalization" and the sum total of a heralded "development of productive forces" and an "intensification of labor." The inward state of affairs is, however, still more deplorable. Sheer, naked lawlessness took the place of the former esteem for labor and its demand for normal, legitimate and all-around development. Playing on the lower instincts of our ignorant and unenlightened proletariat and filling up minds yet immature with such slogans as "Rob the robbers!" "Exterminate the bourgeoisie and its hangers-on!" the Russian working masses swung wildly around and shook off all restraint. Some of the worst types turned to plundering and to lugging home from the factories everything and anything they could lay hands upon: glasses, thermometers, strips of iron, nails, lamps, etc. The heart is gripped with pain at these thoughts. But, facts are facts. The result was a veritable burglarization of the national wealth.

Yet this was not the worst feature of the situation. There always has been theft and robbery in this world, but it acquired its ugliest aspects in this so-called "socialistic order."

The Bolsheviki have soiled the minds of the working masses and have intensified in them a hatred for clean-appearing, or educated people. Workers would often fly into a mad frenzy under the influence of the harangues of their orators and would seize the engineers around the mines as "hangers-on of the bourgeoisie" and drag them for a reckoning to the nearest pit, and few were the occasions, indeed, when the lives of these innocent men were saved from destruction.

By their persecutions they have estranged and made enemies of the intellectual forces of the country. They have dug a deep chasm between themselves and the intellectuals and have thus deprived themselves of the services of science and knowledge. The guilt, however, lies not with the workers, but with those who have taken advantage of their ignorance and have stirred them on to these acts of shame. Instead of respect for human life,—hatred, viciousness and bewilderment developed in the blessed "Socialistic republic" of the Bolsheviki.

Thus, instead of an organized national economy we have complete disorganization, and instead of the socialization of production and distribution—a wild semblance of syndicalism. Each "business Soviet" was deciding things for itself without regard to, or taking account of the general industrial condition of the country, often without knowing the limits and resources of their own districts. As a result, we see throughout Russia stagnation of industry, mass unemployment, intensified enlisting in the Red Army, as the only place where food and wages are secure, while the country is flooded with scraps of paper blustering about "social provision for the working class" and the "socialistic solution of the labor problem."

# The Land Problem in Russia

OUR program, our aim in the struggle against the Bolsheviks, in the struggle of democracy against tyranny, embodies the aims of all who have the interests of our people at heart and who are eager to return Russia to the unswerving path of democratic development. Outside of the pale of democracy and without democracy and its aims, Russia cannot again become a great and powerful country.

Among the fundamental questions that concern Russia at present, among the cardinal problems upon the solution of which the tranquillity of the country and its peaceful advance on the road of progress and prosperity depend—the most important and most difficult one is, of course, the land problem.

The land question was a basic one during the regime of the Autocracy. It retained its importance during the Revolution and will remain a cardinal question until it is finally settled by the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. Its importance rests not alone in the fact that 75 per cent. of Russia's population live by agriculture, and that the development of the productive forces of our country depends upon the satisfactory solution of this problem, but equally in that the entire political future of Russia is predicated upon its final disposition. For, not until the Russian peasantry is satisfied that an equitable and just answer is given to its most immediate and pressing demand—the land—is any political order and organized governmental activity possible.

The Russian Revolution of March, 1917, was inaugurated under a banner upon which were inscribed not only demands for political liberties, but also demands for socialistic reform and, particularly, for a basic change in the land relations,—the transfer of the land to the peasantry living and toiling upon it in the sweat of its brow. All classes in Russia clearly understood at the beginning of the Revolution that the time had come to pay the old debt the country owed to the peasantry, and even the large landowners, whose interests were most affected by this problem, declared through their spokesman, the large Pskov landowner, the President of the Fourth

Duma, Michael Rodzianko, in reply to interrogations by peasants during the Revolution: "Yes, we admit that the fundamental problem of the Constituent Assembly is not merely to construct a political system for Russia, but likewise to give back to the peasantry the land which is at present in our hands." The Russian Provisional Government, under Lvov, as well as under Kerensky, never for a moment lost sight of this question and was gradually accumulating data and clearing the way for the coming Constituent Assembly to meet the just demands of the Russian village.

This article will endeavor to state what the Provisional Government did in this regard during its stay at the helm of affairs, what changes in land relations have been made by the Bolsheviki during their reign and, lastly, what method the newly-born Russian democracy will have to choose in the solution of this problem after clearing the country from the Bolsheviki and until the new Constituent Assembly is convoked.

Having faithfully promised the people to lead the country to the very day of the opening of the Constituent Assembly, the Russian Provisional Government kept its word honorably and did everything in its power and all that was feasible under war conditions and the chaos and disorder inherited from the deceased Autocracy. Certainly, it did not forget to meet its obligation—the gradual solution of the agrarian problem in its fullest sense. The path of the Provisional Government in this respect was particularly beset with difficulties. It must be remembered that the question of allotting the land to the peasants, of the redivision of land properties was a very complex one in the exigencies of the Russian Revolution, for more than one reason. The Provisional Government could not declare a final disposition of this problem until the meeting of the Constituent Assembly, and the mass of the peasantry, just liberated from the serfdom of the Autocracy, was constantly advancing and pressing this very problem to the fore.

To solve the problem intelligently, it was necessary to gather all the information that would present a true index

of land-ownership and cultivation and to conduct a thorough census of the agricultural economy of the country. Here and there, as has happened in every Revolution,—in the Great French Revolution, for instance,—there took place local settlements of this problem by “local measures,” or plain, simple acts of expropriation of land by the peasants. At the same time the army—still composed of several million men—was insistently demanding food and provisions. It became necessary, therefore, to direct all efforts toward the maximum increase of the land area under cultivation for the next agricultural season, a measure which could be accomplished only under conditions of peace and with unity of purpose. The immediate call for the Constituent Assembly made it incumbent upon the Government to complete the immense task of preparing the accumulated material for final disposition by the Constituent Assembly. Thus, the problem presented itself in its full magnitude and complications, and the Provisional Government was acquitting itself with honors in all the difficulties confronting it.

In the first place, by a decree of March 15, 1917, the Provisional Government transferred all the land, forests, lakes and rivers—amounting to four million *desiatin*\*—which had formerly belonged to the Emperor, to the Ministry of Agriculture as State property. This first decree served as a forerunner in this direction. The recognition as national property of the lands of one of Russia’s greatest landowners, the Tzar, definitely paved the way for the further recognition of the principle that the land is the national property of Russia. The age-long desire of the peasantry to obtain ownership of the land, a cause, perhaps, nowhere so universally advocated as in Russia—from the humblest peasant to the highly cultured professor,—and expressed in the aphorism: “The soil belongs to no one; the soil belongs to God; the soil belongs to the people,” was beginning to materialize.

At about the same time, desiring to provide the army and the population of the cities with sufficient foodstuffs, the Provisional Government, two weeks after it was swept into power,

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\* A *desiatin* equals about 3 acres.

with the aid of the local organs of self-government and the Councils of Deputies, organized Food Commissions all over Russia. In order to intensify the cultivation of vacant land areas, the Provisional Government next conferred upon these Food Commissions the right to cultivate such land or to rent it to persons ready to cultivate it. In consequence of this order many landowners who had curtailed their plowings on account of the high cost of farm help were compelled to give over these vacant lands to peasants who were willing and ready to go to work upon it at once. Later, by the decree of April 21, 1917, the Provisional Government instituted Land Commissions throughout Russia, in every township (*volost*), county (*ooyezd*) and government (*gubernia*), for the purpose of gathering, on the spot, all facts, data and materials pertaining to local land-ownership, such information to be later transmitted to the All-Russian Land Commission.

In my article "Mir, Zemstvo and Soviet," I have already stated that one of the purposes of these Commissions was to endeavor to allay local friction arising from land problems, on the one hand, and to conduct the census and gather the material for the land reforms as stated above, on the other hand. These Land Commissions remained, until the subsequent general elections of Zemstvos, independent organs of administration of land problems. They were being elected in the townships, by the village "mirs"; the conventions of the township commissions were electing the commissions for the counties; the county commissions were electing the gubernia commissions, and the latter—the All-Russian Commission.

For the sake of achieving greater results, the Provisional Government invited into the All-Russian Commission the best-known authorities and experts on the land problem in Russia, such as Professor A. S. Posnikov, the Chairman of the Main Land Commission; Professor Kaufman; Professor A. P. Levitzky; Professor B. B. Veselovsky; N. N. Chernenkov; N. N. Kutler; Members of the Duma Dziubinsky and Volkov; Assistant Minister of Agriculture (of the old regime) A. G. Krushov; the well-known leader of the Socialists-Revolutionists, V. M. Chernov; the well-known agrarian experts and



learned economists, A. V. Pieshekhonov, P. P. Maslov, S. L. Maslov, Vikhliaev, Rakitnikov, Oganovsky and many others. The Government made certain that the flower of Russia's science and ability was represented in the Main Land Commission, and its impartiality was attested by their productive and scientific labors permeated with a spirit of justice towards the interests of the people.

I cannot dwell in detail upon the work of these Land Commissions, both local and central. I may only say that thanks to their activity the Provisional Government succeeded in straightening out 99 per cent. of all complications that had arisen out of the land relations and in the preparation of the plan for the great Land Reform. It likewise was successful in passing some temporary laws for the regulation of land problems during the transitory period of the Revolution, which marked the way for the final solution.

During the course of the Revolution and its forward movement, as popular demands were maturing and coming to the fore, our landowners were beginning to realize that they were to part with the land and that the coming Constituent Assembly would, without doubt, declare the land the people's property, and that the most they might expect would be small money indemnities. (It must be noted that the majority of Russian landed estates were not purchased, but were "granted by the Tzars for faithful service" to this or the other nobleman.) In order to obtain a greater value for their holdings, some of these landowners began to sell out their lands at once and to parcel it out or to transfer it fictitiously to foreigners. This created a definite menace to the future prerogative of the Constituent Assembly to solve freely the great, centuries-old question in the interests of the people. It was clear that the Russian State could, in accordance with the principles of international law, only dispose of and have jurisdiction over the lands of its own citizens. In order to safeguard the rights of the Constituent Assembly and to halt the land speculation, by the decree of July 12th, 1917, the Provisional Government forbade all land transactions. The transfer of title to property outside of city limits, according to this decree,

was only permitted with the consent of the local Land Commission, and subsequent confirmation, in each case, by the Minister of Agriculture. Lands which had to be sold at public auction were given over to the temporary control of the State Banks of the Peasants and of the Nobility.

This decree of the Provisional Government, adopted upon the recommendation of the Main Land Commission, practically destroyed land speculation and obviated the difficulties that might have arisen from it for the Constituent Assembly. Proceeding on its way of safeguarding the rights of the people in the solution of the land question and desiring to emancipate itself from the old bureaucratic form of administration and to bring the free, untrammelled expression of the will of the country to the Constituent Assembly, the Provisional Government transferred to the Zemstvos, just as soon as these Zemstvos were elected and organized all over Russia, all questions pertaining to agrarian relations. Having taken into account the paramount desire of the peasant masses for the realization of agrarian reforms, and foreseeing that it would be necessary to create a number of organs to carry out these reforms, the Provisional Government, with the purpose of directing this reform into definite channels, by the law of October 20, 1917, transferred the control of all cultivated lands to the authority of the Land Commissions, except in places where the new Zemstvos were already organized. In the latter instance they were to be supervised by the Land Offices of these Zemstvos.

The historic feature of Russian peasant life—the self-government of the village population and the handling of all local land affairs in a democratic way—thus took on juristic form. It offered the peasantry, at the same time, the opportunity to become convinced that the agrarian problem was being marked for solution in a way most favorable for the peasantry. A further decree, issued by the Provisional Government only a few days before its overthrow, granted to the local organs of self-government in coordination with the Forest Commissions, the control of State and private forests.

Meanwhile, on the basis of the information obtained through the Census made in the summer of 1917 by the Min-

istry of Agriculture, bearing on land values throughout Russia, the material gathered by local Land Commissions and resolutions adopted by these Commissions representing the will and needs of the people, and on the basis of the programs of the various Russian political parties, the Main Land Commission, at the time of its dispersal by the Bolsheviks, had succeeded in preparing a bill for the fundamental Land Reform and transitory measures for its practical enactment. In its principal features, embodied in the first ten paragraphs, this bill was accepted by the Constituent Assembly on January 5, 1918. It is to be regretted that the adoption of the entire bill, as well as the transitory regulations guiding the change from the old to the new system, could not be acted upon by the Assembly, as it was dispersed by the Red Guards. The great Land Reform thus failed to receive a proper legal expression, and the land project did not become a law.

The first ten paragraphs of the Land Bill, adopted by the Constituent Assembly and which had a tremendous influence on the subsequent development of land relations, read as follows:

In the name of the peoples of the Russian State, composing the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, be it ordained that:

1. Right of ownership to land within the limits of the Russian Republic is henceforth and forever abolished.

2. All lands contained within the boundaries of the Russian Republic with all their underground wealth, forests and waters become the property of the people.

3. The control of all lands, the surface and under the surface, and all forests and waters belongs to the Republic, as expressed in the forms of its central administrative organs and organs of local self-government on the principles enacted by this law.

4. Those territories of the Russian Republic which are autonomous in a juridico-governmental conception, are to realize their agrarian plans on the basis of this law and in accord with the Federal Constitution.

5. The aims of the governmental forces and the organs of

local self-government in the sphere of the control of lands, underground riches, forests and waters constitute: (a) The creation of conditions most favorable to the greater exploitation of the natural wealth of the land and the highest development of productive forces; (b) The equitable distribution of all natural wealth among the population.

6. The right of any person or institution to land, underground resources, forests and waters is limited only to the utilization thereof.

7. All citizens of the Russian Republic, and also unions of such citizens and States and social institutions, may become users of land, underground resources, forests and waters, without regard to nationality or religion.

8. The land-rights of such users are to be obtained, become effective and cease under the terms laid down by this law.

9. Land rights belonging at present to private persons, groups and institutions, in so far as they conflict with this law, are herewith abrogated.

10. The transformation of all lands, underground strata, forests and waters, belonging at present to private persons, groups or institutions, into popular property is to be made without recoument to such owners.

Thus, the labors of the Provisional Government and all the work of the Land Commissions and the organs of local self-government was almost completed. It remained only for the people, through their representatives in the Constituent Assembly, to give the Land Reform its final legal shape and form. Unfortunately, the usurpation of the Bolsheviki halted this work, and we, Russians, are still facing this great problem unsolved.

After the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, the Bolsheviki, fully aware of the fact that unless they proclaimed the transfer of the land to the toiling masses of the peasantry, they could not maintain themselves in power, issued a decree about the socialization of land.

A theoretical discussion of this Bolshevik decree would take us too far afield. Its practical results, however, were nil, as the peasantry completely ignored it. The peasants did

not take stock in the proclamation of the Soviets, as they had not participated, as a mass, in their elections, owing to the remarkable voting excesses committed by the Bolsheviks, excesses which I have recited in a previous article. Moreover, having decreed the "basic land law," the Bolsheviks were not capable of organizing the transfer of the land on the basis of even this decree. They corrupted the minds of the masses with such slogans as: "Take whatever you can lay your hands on!" and, consequently, they were no longer in a position to lend their sanction to any "juristic" forms. Their decree, therefore,—aside from the fact that every basic law must essentially be a declaration of certain definite principles,—remained only on paper.

What actually happened was that the peasantry took the land from the landowners and divided it among themselves, in some instances in the spirit of the transitory rules and measures which were part of the Land Reform Commission, wherever these rules were known; but, in the majority of cases, as long as the local Land Commissions continued in existence (they were soon also dispersed by the Bolsheviks), these Commissions divided the land on the basis of the information which each Commission had in its possession. Frequently, however, this division was a case of first come, first grab.

Generally speaking, it may be safely stated that if until January 5, 1918, until the Constituent Assembly, Russia had a variegated system of land relations, there is still less uniformity of such relations at present. We have no exact facts regarding the distribution of the land among the toiling masses to-day, but we do know that, in one way or another, the land was distributed to individual owners and that endless disturbances and disagreements are arising out of it at present.

If, in accordance with the calculations of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Provisional Government and the Main Land Commission, the realization of the land reform,—which includes the allotments of land on the basis of certain standards of productivity and consumption, with due regard to the geographic, colonization and migration ramifications in each in-

stance, and, likewise, to the compensation to those compelled to part with their lands,—had to take approximately from 8 to 10 years, we may reasonably say that when this question will again come up for final disposition before the New Constituent Assembly, the materialization of this reform may take not less than 15 to 20 years. Thanks to the so-called “socialistic” rule of the Bolsheviki, the equitable solution of Russia’s most painful problem was put back a decade.

What, then, is the way out? The key to the honest solution of this question, after the Bolsheviki will have been driven out of power and the Russian State will again rise from its debris must, perforce, remain essentially the same. We must again, pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, gather all data and information regarding the present condition of land relationships, coordinate it, and enact some temporary arrangement, until the Constituent Assembly will find it possible to arrive at a final solution of this vexed and, at present, still more complicated problem. All attempts, however, to restore the status quo that existed before the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly must be discarded.

It is a physical impossibility, as only armed force could take back from the peasants the land which they have taken to themselves, and we will not use armed force, which we require for the struggle with the common enemy, to fight the peasants. It is a political impossibility, as it would open up the gates for another civil war at a time when the regenerated governmental life of Russia wants political quiet and stability above all, and less than anything else—recurrences of Bolshevism, which would be inevitable should the land be forcibly taken back from the peasants. It is sufficient to mention, in this respect, the experiences in the Ukraine during the period of the rule of Hetman Skoropadsky, where Skoropadsky’s Government was compelled to rescind its decree restoring the expropriated estates to their previous owners.

The only solution of the land question acceptable to the toiling masses, until its final disposition by the future Constituent Assembly, was advanced in No. 4, “Struggling Russia,” by Catherine Breshkovsky in her article, “What We Are Fighting

For." This plan was first suggested in the declaration of the Provisional Government of the Ural, formed towards the end of last summer in Ekaterinburg after the Bolsheviki were driven out. The second paragraph of that declaration stated: "Until the solution of the land question in full by the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, the Ural Government leaves all agricultural lands in the hands of their present actual possessors, taking at the same time various measures to safeguard the interests of the Government and likewise to preserve the freedom of expression of its will on this problem by the future Constituent Assembly." Later, in accordance with the Ufa Conference, the All-Russian Provisional Government (The Directorate) accepted this point of view and solemnly restated it in its declaration. In November, 1918, the Ural Government and the All-Russian Directorate enacted a number of laws in conformity with this principle. The "Grandmother of the Russian Revolution," in advancing this point among others under the heading "Our Program," speaks, therefore, not only for herself, but voices the opinion of the entire democracy of Russia which is at present combatting the tyranny of Lenine and Trotzky.

I am coming to the end of this necessarily brief statement on the land problem in Russia. We have seen that all charges of "bourgeois" and counter-revolutionism made against the Provisional Government and the Constituent Assembly are falsehoods from beginning to end. We are convinced that the regenerated Russian democracy, imbued with the spirit of unanimity, will cling to the covenants of the First Revolutionary Government and the First Constituent Assembly in treating this cardinal problem in the reconstruction of Russia's social life. We may confidently say that the Russian democracy will never betray its old slogan, which lies at the very bottom of new Russia, a motto put forth more than one hundred years ago by the Russian writer, Radischev, and later adopted by those great Russians, Herten and Chernishevsky, prior to the "people's movement" during the late seventies, a universally-known slogan which finally was made a fact by Russia's First Constituent Assembly—"The Land to the People!"

# The Labor Problem in Russia

*"In days of great ailing  
Musk and rose oil will not avail,  
And none are more useless than  
such remedies . . ."*

—HEINE.

## I

RUSSIA is recovering. She is returning to the life-standards of other civilized nations and will soon take her place in their ranks. But her recovery from the fearful malady of Bolshevism is still fraught with countless dangers. She will have to cure herself not only in a political way,—by returning to the political program of the Kerensky Provisional Government, based upon the recognition of democratic liberties and popular rule, from the very top to the bottom, from the village district Zemstvo to the Constituent Assembly,—but also to undergo a drastic economic cure.

If, after the Tzarist regime and the Great War, revolutionary Russia inherited a semi-destroyed and upset national economy and finances, after the rule of the Bolsheviki she will receive an industry completely destroyed and finances and credit just as thoroughly wiped out. Moreover, we shall receive in heritage a poisoned psychology of the working masses, enfeebled from hunger and idleness and corrupted through unemployment and the Red Army.

However, the process of recovery is proceeding apace. More and more territory is being freed from the Bolsheviki, and the ring around the so-called Soviet Russia is becoming tighter and tighter. The uprisings within that ring against the tyrannies of the Bolsheviki's rule are flaring up with ever-increasing frequency, and in the ranks of the "rebels" we frequently observe many of the erstwhile loyal adherents of Bolshevism, city workers and workers in numerous factories and industrial establishments.

Therein lies the security of our success and the righteousness of our cause. The workers are beginning to realize, as many of them have already realized, that without statehood,



without a recognized governmental power, without political liberty and self-rule—that under tyranny, covered though it be with the most grandiose nomenclature, “socialism,” “communism,” and such like—life is unbearable, progress is impossible, and knowledge, humaneness and the common welfare, the welfare of the working class included, is a hollow pretense.

The labor problem is thus closely bound up, as the experience of the past has abundantly proven to the working class, with all other questions of social life, and without their solution the labor problem is also impossible of solution. We cannot speak of or enact an eight-hour law when there is no labor; we cannot discuss a minimum wage when there is no work; we cannot talk of trades unions when the trades are destroyed; about collective agreements when there is only one contracting party in evidence; about social insurance when it is high time to insure the entire working mass against unemployment, as all industry is at a standstill. Under such circumstances one can only speak of national pensioning, practically what the whole scheme of “nationalization” of industry by the Bolsheviki actually amounts to. (See “The Bolshevist Economic Policy,” pp. 21-24.)

These questions are beginning to loom up already, but they will come up in their full importance when the real lord of Russia will come into his own—the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. While the gradual liberation of the territories from the Bolsheviki by the victorious Republican Armies is proceeding, only temporary regulations of an incomplete nature, regulations adopted and enacted in practice by the Provisional Government of Kerensky, are possible. But as soon as life will have entered into more normal channels, an immediate regulation of labor relations will become a pressing necessity, on the basis of permanent, well-conceived and equitable legislation. The democracy of Russia and its future governmental powers will come face to face with these problems, and their fate may be sad, indeed, if they attempt to postpone the solution of these problems indefinitely, or to solve them along lines other than those outlined not only by the Russian Revolution, but also by the World-War.

## II

The Russian Revolution, in its natural course, has brought up for solution, along with the land question, the problem of labor, as one of the most important social problems. Upon the correct and purposeful solution of this problem will depend Russia's entire national economy, the development of our productive forces and our industrial future. That this question, aside from its economic importance, has an immense significance for all the political life of Russia, was fully understood by the Provisional Government, and during its short-lived rule it enacted a number of fundamental labor laws and outlined a complete program to be sanctioned by the All-Russian Constituent Assembly.

We are referring here, as we did in our past articles and expect to in the future, to the activities of the Provisional Government which was overthrown by the Bolsheviki. We do it quite studiously. We desire to achieve by this the following: (1) To disprove the charge directed against the Kerensky Cabinet that it devoted its time to oratorical feats and not to actual creative work, and (2) To remove the insinuation that the Kerensky Government was tainted with any counter-revolutionist tendencies. From the facts cited in my previous articles and the facts that follow below, the American reader may realize that it is a gravely unjust accusation. The Russian Provisional Government, notwithstanding its brief tenure of office and the colossal difficulties it had to face in its work—the War, the upset economic and industrial conditions and the uncontrollable revolutionary waves—had succeeded in accomplishing a tremendous legislative program, including the labor problem, too, and had marked out a gradual plan of solving it in the interests of the working masses.

When we stated that after the Bolsheviki are dislodged from power, we shall have to return to the labor problem outlined by the Russian Revolution, we mean precisely the program of the Provisional Government. We would be undertaking too much to analyze the entire amount of work accomplished in this respect by that Government. We shall content ourselves, therefore, with only brief references to it when we come to

discuss the main points of the labor problem. We cannot fail, therefore, to bring before the reader a part of the declaration of the last Kerensky Cabinet concerning general economic conditions and the labor problem in particular. In brief, this program amounted to the following:

**1. In the Domain of the Organization of Popular Economy**

The Provisional Government will strive to fix firm prices for staple industrial products and will simultaneously regulate the mutual relations between labor and capital, earnings and working hours. The Government will invite cooperatives of all types to participate in the production and distribution of all kinds of agricultural and industrial products, under the general direction of Governmental organs. The Government will also broadly utilize for this purpose all private commercial agencies, under its own immediate supervision. The introduction, by a definite law, of Government control of production with the participation of representatives of the working and industrial classes, and an active interest in the directing of enterprises for the raising of their productive standards, will be one of the aims of the Government. Also, a further development of the system of Labor Exchanges and Arbitration Courts, and the safeguarding of the right of organization for workers of all classes of labor, with the guarantee of personal safety from aggression and attack to the technical managing staffs of all enterprises.

If we add to this social insurance of workers, we have before us the entire labor problem reduced to the following points: (1) The work hours; (2) Regulation of wages (minimum wages, collective bargaining, etc.); (3) Labor exchanges; (4) Mediation agencies; (5) Freedom of organization (trade unions, strikes, etc.); (6) Social insurance (sickness, injuries, age, disability, maternity, death and unemployment); (7) Government control of industry with the participation of labor representatives, and (8) The regulation of prices of staple products of industry.

The Provisional Government had marked for solution all these questions which at present confront the entire world in connection with the ending of the War and which were

made the subject of discussion by the Labor Section of the Peace Conference. The resurrected Russian democracy is now again face to face with these questions, and we have no doubt that they will all be solved fully in the spirit of the times, upon the basis of science and in the interests of the working masses.

In what direction did the Provisional Government solve these problems, and how does the Russian democracy propose to solve it at present? In the article "What We Are Fighting For" by "Baboushka" Breshkovsky ("Struggling Russia," April 12, 1919) there are outlined a number of concrete proposals along this line. Her program, as we have stated several times, is also our program—the program of the entire democracy of Russia which is waging war against the Bolsheviki. The purpose of this article is merely to present a more detailed and clarifying discussion of the principles laid down by the leaders of our democracy.

### III

Five days after it was formed, on March 3, 1917, the Russian Provisional Government,—having declared the above-mentioned program and "considering it as its immediate aim to place the labor problem for proper solution,"—organized a preparatory investigation for the drafting of required bills, on the one hand, and the foundation of a Ministry of Labor, for the first time in Russian history, on the other. Among the prominent experts of industrial economy and the labor movement invited to participate in this preparatory work we shall only mention Professors M. B. Bernatzky, Bykov, Bukovetzky, Cherevanin and others. Direct representatives of the workers were also invited to take part.

The mutual work of these men resulted in the preparation of laws, later confirmed by the Provisional Government, pertaining to the freedom of trades unions, workers' committees in industries, arbitration boards and labor exchanges, i. e., all questions that were irresistibly pressing to the front and which were banned by the old laws of Tzarism. Not wishing to take upon itself the responsibility, until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, of legislating the eight-hour day for the entire land, the Provisional Government gave the

workers, by the laws of freedom of organization and strikes, a weapon to obtain it by means of agreement with the employing class. On April 15, 1917, the Petrograd Association of Manufacturers and Foundrymen, the organization of the industrial capitalists of the Petrograd district, and the United Committees of the Trades Unions of Petrograd did, indeed, reach an understanding about the introduction of eight hours as a normal work day, in all the industrial establishments of the district. The example of Petrograd was soon followed all over Russia, and, almost without a struggle, towards the end of the summer of 1917, the eight-hour workday became an accomplished fact all over Russia. There remained only to give this fact a legalized form in order to insure faithful adherence to it by both sides. Doubtless, this would have been accomplished if the normal development of Russian life had not been shattered by the criminal policies of the Bolsheviki.

At the same time, the Provisional Government, as the actual owner of all the State factories and works (which were placed during the War under the control of the military authorities) ordered on April 15, 1917, the eight-hour workday to be declared as the normal workday in all such factories, with a seven-hour day on the eve of holidays, thus reducing the work-week to forty-seven hours, in comparison with the 54-56 hours under the old regime.

The conflicts between the employers and employees were not, however, limited to the demand for an eight-hour work-day! Complications, which thwarted, in one way or another, normal production so badly needed by the country ravaged by a long War and shaken up by a great Revolution, were arising daily. The Provisional Government was, therefore, compelled to direct its attention, without delay, to the regulation of mutual relations between labor and capital,—while in the midst of the preparation of a comprehensive bill for the governmental regulation and control of industry predicated upon the existence of strong labor unions and the fixing of wages, profits and marketing prices,—and in order to insure order and peace in factories and works, issued the law of April 23, 1917, about "Workers' Commissions in industrial establishments."

These committees, in accordance with the law, were to consist of members elected by the workers of the given establishment on the basis of a universal (women and minors included) equal, direct and secret vote. (It may be mentioned here that in contrast to the Bolshevik "creative" work—their decrees, the Russian Provisional Government's, whenever it was possible and dictated by the logic of events, adhered to democratic principles.)

The business of these commissions was: (a) To represent the workers before the management of the shop or factory in regard to questions affecting the firm and the workers, such as wages, prices, working hours, working conditions, etc.; (b) To settle disputes between the workers themselves; (c) To represent the workers before governmental and social institutions; (d) To take care of cultural and educational work among the workers of the establishment and other measures intended for their welfare. Again, by the law of May 30, 1917, the Provisional Government laid down the foundation for arbitration institutions, and, first of all, for the establishment of arbitration courts "to solve all misunderstandings arising between the employers and their managers on the one hand, and the workers on the other."

By these measures, the Government and the workers, who both participated in their preparation, aimed to solve the difficulties arising, in a peaceful way, a condition which was sorely needed in those days of supreme national effort. Unfortunately, owing to the agitation of the Bolsheviks who were opposing all negotiations with the "bourgeoisie" and who were branding everything that emanated from the Kerensky Cabinet as "bourgeois" measures and preaching as a panacea for all ills "immediate peace and the dictatorship of the proletariat,"—many of the measures enacted by the Government, in cooperation with the best representatives of the working class, failed of proper practical application. The surging waves of Bolshevism soon completely swept away these first acts of social legislation, replacing them by precepts that were contrary to the fundamental conceptions of the labor movement, which spelled the death of the trades unions

and struck at every activity in the direction of the regulation of the problem of labor in Russia.

#### IV

At present, when the beacon-lights of a free democratic development of our Motherland are seen in the distance again, when colossal efforts by the entire nation are needed for the recreating of her political and economic life, we are again confronted with the question of labor legislation. In this situation we must account for and avail ourselves of our past experience and weigh carefully our aims, plans for the regeneration of Russia and her productivity and the productive importance of the working class. We must not forget, we cannot forget, that without peace within the working class, without the satisfaction of its wants and aspirations, we cannot erect the future structure of great Russia.

In the first place, therefore, the Russian democracy, that is now being freed from Bolshevism, advances its labor program together with the rehabilitation of all political liberties and the rule of the people. In this manner have acted the Northern Government of Tchaikovsky, the Territorial Government of the Ural, the Ufa conference; and the Omsk Government, the principal unit fighting against Bolshevism must, logically, continue in the same direction if it does not want to be overthrown. All these enumerated governments emphasize in their declarations the importance of the labor problem in general, the industrial economy of the land, and solemnly declare adherence to the basic principles of the labor program outlined by the Russian Provisional Government and the Revolution.

We accept, without conditions and reservation, the following program:

1. The eight-hour day as a normal workday and the six-hour day in mining, underground and extra-hazardous (chemical) industries.
2. Full freedom of organization of workers in trades unions and professional organizations for the improvement of their conditions and the promotion of solidarity among them.
3. Freedom of strikes and coalition as a necessary requisite

of the class struggle. Human beings are not sheep: the class struggle has always existed, exists at present, and will remain with us for a long time to come. We recognize it and we have to consider it.

4. The prohibition of child labor, and in certain trades, on the one hand, and at certain periods, on the other—the prohibition of female labor.

5. Social insurance against sickness, injuries, disability, old age, maternity, death and unemployment, at the expense of the State and the employers. It must be remembered that in Soviet Russia these features are treated in a most disgusting manner. Having destroyed all the insurance organizations in the country which were in existence before the Revolution, the Bolsheviki decreed “social insurance” by the State, 15 per cent. of the earnings of the workers to be applied towards the State insurance fund. In reality, however, no such application ever took place, and the destruction of the old societies or companies placed the masses of sick and disabled who were relying on these mutual organizations for their support, in a hopeless condition.

6. The reestablishment of the Labor Exchanges, organized for relief of local unemployed, at the expense of local agencies of self-government, and the reestablishment of the Arbitration Courts.

7. The reestablishment of the “Workers’ Committee on Industry” on the basis of the law of the Provisional Government, and the organization of workers’ secretariates for the rendering of practical aid to the working class.

8. The regulation of earnings and wages, such as the fixing of a minimum wage on basis of the minimum production per workday. We must not lose sight of the fact that Bolshevism has poisoned the psychology of the workmen, that masses of workers have become corrupted from sheer idleness, and that their productivity has fallen to an incredible degree. Therefore, when we declare in favor of an eight-hour day and a minimum wage necessary for the satisfaction of the worker’s wants, we ask of him a definite duty, the return of a sufficient



amount of labor for a given time. This quota of labor must be determined by the workers' representatives of each trade and profession and made part of a collective agreement, freely entered into and adhered to in accordance with the new law, between the workers and the employers.

9. The further regulation of industry by the State, in the sense of governmental control of industry, through local organs of popular government and by local labor bodies; the fixing of a rate of profits, and, as far as necessary, the fixing of market prices in order to eliminate speculation which has developed enormously together with the impoverishment of the land.

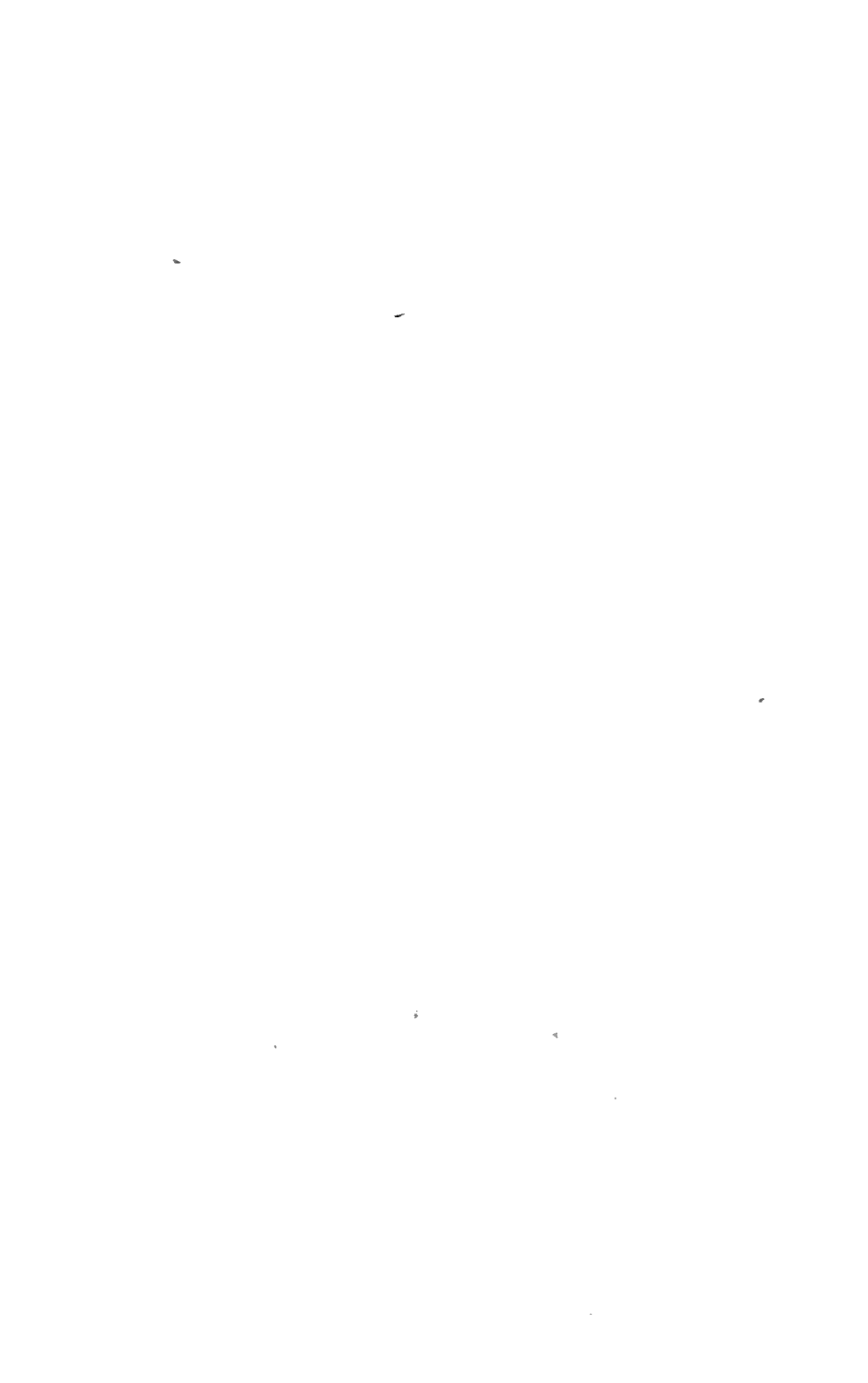
We are passing through the "twelfth" hour of our history. We shall either survive as a great democratic country or we shall disappear temporarily from the scene of events. Of course, we want to live! But, in order to achieve life we must not hesitate before determined action to save and recover it, remembering the beautiful words of St. Just, as told by Heine,

*"In days of great ailings  
Musk and rose oil will not avail  
And none are more useless than such remedies..."*

Quite naturally, the question of governmental interference in industry and the life of the workers comes to the fore. Now that both the employers and the workers have witnessed the chaos wrought by the destruction of the economic life of Russia by the Bolsheviks, our situation is much simplified. The struggling classes, labor and capital, must and will be able to effect a change from the death-grapple which has played havoc with the whole nation, to a temporary collective agreement defining their mutual relations and the duties which both classes must undertake at present in the interests of entire Russia.

Government regulation and interference must, therefore, become the slogan of all those who aspire to live in a great Russia. But we must remember that there exists the danger of an illusion that may lead some of us to believe that the remedy of State control and interference, at the present stage in the economic and political condition of Russia, is the pana-

cea for all the ills we suffer from. Indeed, we place our faith in this cure, but we are conscious at the same time that this State inteference requires, on the one hand, a strong, authoritative governmental power, and powerful trade and professional organizations, on the other. Both of these are only possible of achievement with the satisfaction of the basic demand of the Russian people—the All-Russian Constituent Assembly.









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